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ABSTRACT

Colleges of further education in Great Britain have been involved in three recent initiatives in the implementation of ethnic monitoring: (1) a report on ethnic monitoring in postsecondary education; (2) two management training conferences on the implementation and uses of ethnic monitoring for representatives of further, adult, and higher education as well as local authorities; and (3) ethnic monitoring at the course level as the result of a more detailed study of how individual colleges use ethnic monitoring data to inform their internal planning and policymaking practices, improve the quality of services, and promote equal opportunities for ethnic minorities. Among potential benefits to be gained from introducing ethnic monitoring are that such monitoring facilitates: the collection of background data to use for future developments on equal opportunities; the ability of colleges to review provision and service delivery in the light of analysis of ethnic background information on their student body; and the drawing of comparisons across the years in the areas of services to minority groups. Ethnic monitoring has revealed that black students tend to enroll in low-level courses, Asian women are underrepresented in further and higher education, and there are differences in enrollment patterns between men and women. Key issues to evolve from ethnic monitoring at course level include the need for involvement of senior management, the importance of publication and dissemination of results, and the necessity of relating ethnic data to other information. (KC)

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ETHNIC MONITORING AND ITS USES IN COLLEGES

January 1992

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the Further Education Unit (FEU) has been involved in a number of initiatives concerning the implementation of ethnic monitoring in colleges of further education and the use of the resulting information. They include:

1. *Ethnic Monitoring in Further and Higher Education: An account of the ILEA's initiative (1)* a report of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) policy on, and experience of, ethnic monitoring in the post-schools sector;
2. two management training conferences on the implementation and uses of ethnic monitoring for representatives of further, adult and higher education and local authorities;
3. ethnic monitoring at course level as the result of a more detailed study of how individual colleges had been able to use their ethnic monitoring data to inform their internal planning and policy-making practices; improve the quality of the services provided; and further equal opportunities for the ethnic minorities.

This bulletin provides a brief description of these three initiatives including the potential benefits of ethnic monitoring; recommendations for instituting it; a discussion of the implications for colleges and recommendations for improving current practice.

1. ETHNIC MONITORING IN FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION: AN ACCOUNT OF THE ILEA'S INITIATIVE

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This was commissioned before the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). ILEA was chosen because of its unique experience as the first and largest LEA to introduce the policy of regular annual ethnic monitoring of the student initiatives to all further and higher education courses run by its colleges. ILEA had experience of collecting and analysing ethnic monitoring data for three consecutive years and each annual survey involved a total of 27 colleges and more than 130,000 students.

The report aimed to identify the practical lessons to be learnt from the implementation of ethnic monitoring within the ILEA; the potential uses of such data and to assist others to adopt appropriate strategies and ensure the successful introduction of their ethnic monitoring policies. It has been particularly relevant since the Government's 1990 decision to make the collection of ethnic data mandatory in further education.

Potential benefits of ethnic monitoring

The report also demonstrated that ethnic monitoring is an important tool for the assessment and review of colleges' activities; identifying possible areas of inequality and helping to implement appropriate changes in policy and practice. It must be integrated into equal opportunities policies with commitment at the top of the institution. Within such a context, monitoring can indicate areas requiring investigation and that investigation will take place.

Among the potential benefits from introducing ethnic monitoring are:

- the collection and analysis of student ethnic background data to inform future developments on equal opportunities. Although data may often confirm unquantified observation, a detailed analysis will add statistical weight to the need for positive action;
- the ability of colleges to review provision and service delivery in the light of analysis of ethnic background information on their student body;
- year-on-year comparisons which can be drawn to show trends in the pattern of student enrolment. This would be particularly useful in relation to course development;
- statistical information which provides invaluable assistance in tackling specific issues and will strengthen efforts to encourage others to comply with equal opportunities policies.

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Findings of ethnic monitoring data

The analysis of authority-wide figures over time revealed considerable stability in patterns of both ethnic and gender differences in participation in further and higher education in ILEA colleges. Ethnic data was related to information about gender, age, mode of attendance, level of course, borough of residence and college attended. The major findings included the following:

- Black students tend to enrol on low-level courses.
- Asian women are under-represented in further and higher education (FHE).
- Black students tend to be older than white students.
- There are differences in enrolment patterns between men and women.
- There are disproportionate numbers from ethnic groups attending courses under different modes (block, day and evening release) with black students least represented on employer-sponsored courses.
- Women and black students are under-represented on block-release and part-time day courses.
- Black students are more highly represented in the free fee and the concessionary fee status categories than white students.
- There are marked differences at the borough level in the sex, ethnic and age backgrounds of students enrolled on further and higher education courses.
- Colleges vary considerably in the non-response rate of student replies to the voluntary questions on their ethnic background on the enrolment form.

Recommendations for instituting ethnic monitoring

The report concluded that:

1. Ethnic monitoring should be seen as an integral part of the wider policy objective of implementing equal opportunities in FHE.
2. Voluntary student self-classification is the most appropriate method of collecting ethnic data.
3. A standard ethnic classification scheme should be adopted to allow comparisons within and between LEAs. However, at the college level, the standard classification should be capable of sub-division so that it provides detailed information of relevance to local circumstances.
4. The strict protection of student confidentiality is essential.
5. Students should receive a full explanation of the reasons for ethnic monitoring and be assured of confidentiality.
6. Ethnic data should be collected at the level of the individual student in computerised form as part of the student record. This will enable analysis of ethnic data according to gender, age, level and type of course, providing better management information.
7. College staff should be briefed about the importance of ethnic monitoring to assist a high response rate.
8. The results of ethnic monitoring should be disseminated at a variety of levels e.g. LEA, college, departmental, course.
9. Ethnic monitoring data should be used to assist course planning, review and targeting, and marketing and publicity strategies within the college.
10. The ethnic monitoring of student intakes should be linked with records of student outcomes so that drop-out, achievement and progression can be investigated.

The DES and Welsh Office have also recognised the value of ethnic monitoring for the successful implementation of equal opportunities policies.

The purpose of such monitoring is to alert managers and decision-makers to potential problems and so enable corrective action to be taken. If equal opportunities in FHE are to be assured, it is deriable in the view of the Departments, that appropriate statistical monitoring techniques should be developed more widely and more consistently. Statistics on their own do not provide answers but they do point up questions and areas requiring further investigation. Without them the facts cannot be established, hearsay and impressionistic evidence cannot be refuted or supported, and adequate equal opportunities policies cannot be developed (2).

2. THE MANAGEMENT TRAINING CONFERENCES

Following the publication of its report of ILEA's initiative and the decision to make the collection of ethnic monitoring data mandatory in public sector FHE,

the Department of Education and Science (DES) asked FEU to organise the two management training conferences on the implementation and uses of ethnic monitoring for representatives of further, adult and higher education and local authorities. The conferences discussed the equal opportunities policy content; consultations and communication; mechanisms of collection and confidentiality; and the appropriate dissemination of information outcomes. They aimed to establish how colleges can best use the information in the development of equal opportunities.

The role of ethnic monitoring

At the conferences, Sir Peter Newsam, Director of the Institute of Education, University of London, clarified the role of, and the rationale for, ethnic monitoring. He stressed its status as a *tool* only, a means towards the end of ensuring equal opportunities. He argued that the reasons for using this tool, despite its intrusion into privacy and its additional burden upon administration, are threefold - ethical, economic and legal.

Possession of information is the starting point for working towards social justice, for appropriate marketing and for complying with anti-discrimination legislation. Sir Peter commented on the inadequacy of mere compliance with the letter of the law, emphasising his conviction that legislation, by way of changing behaviour, can change attitudes also.

Ethnic categories

The lack of Further Education Statistical Returns (FESR)/OPCS comparability due to the 'prefer not to say' box; the static nature of the categorisation and the inadequacy of the one 'white' category at the top of the list were also discussed.

The DES has recommended the use of the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) ethnic categories for ethnic monitoring to ensure that colleges' information will be comparable to that obtained from the 1991 Census (although a 'prefer not to say' box is also included).

The DES categories are as follows:

White	Pakistani
Black African	Bangladesh
Black Caribbean	Chinese
Black other (please describe)	Other (please describe)
Indian	Prefer not to say.

A presentation of the more detailed list of ethnic categories used by ILEA in its monitoring argued however were also discussed that this categorisation provided more detailed information to colleges in ethnically diverse areas, whilst still being capable of aggregation into the DES groups for DES returns.

The ILEA ethnic classification is as follows:

Black	White
African	English/Scots/Welsh
Arab	Irish
Bangladeshi	Greek
Caribbean	Turkish
Chinese	Other European
Pakistani	Other
Vietnamese	
Other	

Implications of ethnic monitoring

Discussions of the implications of ethnic monitoring for colleges were led by representatives of FEU, Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), the former Research and Statistics Branch of ILEA, and vice principals of two colleges. It was pointed out that the key question must be 'who benefits from ethnic monitoring?' If ethnic minorities do not benefit from the activity, it is wasted. In addition, the cyclical process by which ethnic monitoring should impel action was noted. The key to this effective establishment of the process is staff development (for *all* staff) to enable support of every stage of the process.

policy (ethnic monitoring as element of equal opportunities policy)
marketing the policy – convincing staff and students
form-filling at enrolment: data collection
information gathering from recorded data
formative use of information
action? e.g. access? and review?

Case studies of colleges' experiences of using ethnic monitoring data were also presented. The use of the information by one college was seen in nine areas of action:

- curriculum
- staffing
- environment
- student support
- marketing
- resources
- equal opportunities
- administration
- catering.

Another college reported that ethnic monitoring was enabling appropriate action to be taken for access and curriculum development.

The plenary session of the conference focused on the action at the course level. Given a framework of institutional commitment, the information can make a major contribution to all elements of course review as outlined below:

Formative use of ethnic monitoring at course level

3. ETHNIC MONITORING AT COURSE LEVEL

In addition to LEA-wide, overall college and departmental analysis of ethnic monitoring data, statistics concerning the ethnic composition of the student body at the level of the individual course are extremely valuable. The detailed research study (mentioned in the Introduction) is briefly described here but greater attention is paid to the key issues identified by the project and outlining the resulting recommendations on ensuring that ethnic monitoring data are used effectively by individual institutions.

Two institutions (one general and one specialist college) were chosen for case studies because members of staff had shown a particular interest in obtaining detailed feedback of ethnic monitoring information for their college, or had conducted their own surveys of student intakes to particular courses in order to analyse the ethnic composition of such intakes in detail.

Aims and methods

The aim of the study was to establish how colleges can derive maximum benefit from the increasing availability of ethnic monitoring information by looking at current and potential future uses of such information in particular institutions. The survey was intended to focus on the value of providing information at the level of the individual course.

Each case-study college was provided with detailed information about the ethnic background, age, sex, and borough of residence composition of student intakes aggregated to the level of the individual course. This information was provided in addition to the overall annual analyses of enrolments for the Authority and for individual institutions which examine differences in enrolments by age, gender and ethnic group, and provide details of gender and ethnic differences according to mode of attendance, Burnham course level, type of fees paid and borough of residence.

A questionnaire schedule was developed as the basis for structured interviews with key members of the colleges' senior management team. It was designed to obtain information about how colleges could or did use their ethnic monitoring data and focused on four areas in detail: student intakes; student outcomes; staff; and administration.

The questionnaire/interview data were analysed separately for the two case-study colleges and, supplementary material relevant to ethnic monitoring was collected from colleges.

Results and key issues

The Uses of Ethnic Monitoring Data project was instituted to describe and promote positive uses of monitoring information at the level of the individual institution. It was felt that, to date, ethnic monitoring initiatives had focused too strongly on providing LEA-wide analyses and comparisons, and that the feedback of monitoring statistics to colleges had not been sufficiently detailed, nor with appropriate guidance to potential uses and interpretation.

By investigating in depth the ways in which two different colleges had, or intended to use detailed ethnic monitoring data, it has been possible to make some general observations and recommendations. These do not offer an exhaustive account of appropriate and positive uses of ethnic monitoring data, but it is hoped that they will provide a stimulus for further discussion and action in colleges.

i. Involvement of senior management

It became clear from the two case studies that there was great variability in the actual uses to which ethnic monitoring data have been put. Much appears to depend upon the commitment and enthusiasm of senior management. For example, significant steps had been taken at the initiative of one vice principal and it is likely that his direction helped to ensure that staff were aware that ethnic monitoring was a priority for the college.

If colleges wish to ensure that the introduction of ethnic monitoring of student intakes is given due recognition as an important activity and source of key management information, it will be necessary for a senior member of the management team to take overall responsibility for its conduct and to retain close contact with, and an active interest in, all aspects of monitoring.

This will include setting up a system, informing and briefing staff, analysis, dissemination and use of the resulting statistics, and their presentation to appropriate committees and decision-making bodies.

ii. Publication and dissemination

The experiences of both the case-study colleges (which conducted their own course-level ethnic monitoring surveys in order to get up-to-date and detailed information for their decision-making bodies before the inception of this project) illustrate the need to ensure that monitoring data are published promptly and distributed widely within the college environment. One of the early difficulties experienced by ILEA colleges was a time lag in providing colleges with feedback on the results of the survey. One advantage of colleges taking responsibility for inputting, accessing and analysing their own monitoring data after April 1990 may be that it will be possible for colleges to obtain ethnic monitoring statistics more rapidly and in the form most suited to their particular purposes. (However, one disadvantage may be the possible absence of overall ILEA-wide statistics for comparative purposes.)

It is vital that ethnic monitoring data are analysed and made available promptly at a variety of levels to ensure maximum use by managers and decision-making bodies within the institution. For example, overall college figures on ethnic composition analysed according to age, sex, mode of study, level of course, fee category, borough (or area) of residence, etc. are valuable for identifying broad trends over time, and for highlighting areas of under- or over-representation. It is helpful if such statistics can be compared with those of other colleges and the LEA as a whole.

It is also necessary, however, to compile more detailed breakdowns of the monitoring data for other purposes: at the departmental/section level and perhaps most importantly, at the level of the individual course. Compiling details of the ethnic composition of individual courses is particularly helpful because it can highlight the existence of trends in recruitment, and should be related to information about the composition of the local college catchment area to assist in the identification of possible unmet community needs. Course-level monitoring information will enable departmental heads to establish whether certain ethnic groups are concentrated on particular kinds or levels of course (e.g. sponsored or non-sponsored; part-time or full-time; low-level or more advanced). Such information may prompt further investigation as to the causes of any consistent patterns. It should prove of particular value for ensuring appropriate marketing and publicity of different courses (e.g. it may indicate the need to use the ethnic minority press to advertise certain courses, or to produce publicity material in languages other than English).

iii. Relating ethnic data to other information

The case studies both illustrated the value of detailed course-level analyses of ethnic monitoring data. It is especially advantageous if course profiles are constructed over time which also show other details about student composition, disaggregated by age, gender and residence as well as ethnic group on an annual basis.

The advantage of collecting ethnic information as part of the student enrolment form on a computerised basis (with strict regard for individual confidentiality and anonymity) is that this facilitates the analysis of such information at different levels and enables ethnic data to be related to other information at the individual level so that age, gender and residence can be cross-related and displayed in an aggregated form. Such data can be recorded for consecutive years and provisional interpretations of trends and patterns constructed.

It is argued that such information should form an integral part of course review processes and provide a focus for departmental discussion and planning.

iv. Maximising the response rate

Analysis of course-level ethnic monitoring information by the case-study colleges revealed that, there were very marked variations in the percentage of students who failed to complete the ethnic monitoring question on their enrolment form. It appeared that students on part-time or evenings-only courses were less likely to respond to the question. In addition, in multi-site institutions there was evidence of considerable differences in the response rate at the site level.

Although completion of the ethnic question at enrolment is not compulsory for students, the results of the case studies suggest that the course-level variations in response rates were frequently a result of either students or enrolment staff, or in some cases both, mistakenly assuming that the ethnic question was not intended for completion by all students and all modes of attendance, but was intended for those on full-time courses or only for ethnic minority students. If ethnic monitoring data are to be of maximum value, it is vital that colleges put time and effort into ensuring a high response from all courses and all groups.

All staff, but especially those concerned with enrolment, need to be fully briefed as to the purpose and objectives of ethnic monitoring, and made aware that it applies to all students on all courses. Staff should be fully informed so that they can answer any queries from students about the purpose of the ethnic question and give appropriate reassurances about confidentiality and anonymity. Appropriate training should be provided for staff.

In addition, students should be provided with information at the time of enrolment describing why they are being asked to indicate their ethnic background, and emphasising the importance of the survey for promoting equal opportunities, and the safeguards for confidentiality and anonymity. ILEA devised some special notes for students for use during the 1989-90 enrolment period in an attempt to improve the overall response rate, and these may be of interest to colleges in other LEAs. (A copy of these notes is included in the first report of this project *Ethnic Monitoring in Further and Higher Education: An account of the ILEA's initiative* FEU 1989.)

In addition to notes, special posters were prepared for display during enrolment periods to explain that the ethnic monitoring survey was an integral part of the college's commitment to equal opportunities.

In a multi-ethnic community it is, of course, important that provision is made for students to receive information about the college's ethnic monitoring surveys in community languages appropriate to the particular location of the college and the catchment area it serves.

The value of ethnic monitoring information is increased if information is also obtained at enrolment about students who are bilingual, and about students' home languages. This was not done as part of ILEA's ethnic monitoring surveys, but one of the case-study colleges had collected such details as part of its internal ethnic monitoring pilot exercise and found these data helpful in responding to community needs.

v. Integrating monitoring data into planning/policy-making processes

The need to ensure that a senior member of the college management team (e.g. the vice principal) is responsible for the overall conduct, analysis, presentation and use of ethnic monitoring information has already been stressed. It is, of course, vital that ethnic monitoring data are fully integrated into all the college's planning and policy-making processes if they are to inform such processes adequately. Careful consideration needs to be given to providing statistics (with accompanying interpretative notes) at the level most appropriate to particular groups or bodies. For example, course-level statistics will be needed by individual course tutors, department boards of study and those responsible for decisions concerning course offer, course reviews, publicity and marketing. However, information presented at the level of the department or site may be particularly relevant for the equal opportunities committee, governors or academic board.

Given the possible lack of familiarity with the use and interpretation of statistical information, ethnic monitoring data should be presented in as simple and accessible a form as possible. Long or complex tables should be avoided, and simple graphic techniques such as bar or pie charts might be helpful.

It is important for colleges to recognise the potential danger that any ethnic monitoring survey risks of being seen as an end in itself, simply because it is a statutory requirement, rather than becoming a source of management information and a basis for discussion and action to improve the quality and responsiveness of the service provided by the college. The results of the survey

should be seen as a vital component of the college's equal opportunities policy and management process. It is crucial that senior management ensure that appropriate checking mechanisms are devised and instituted to ensure that the data are in use. It may prove helpful to require all departments to make an annual report on their monitoring statistics, and the action taken or planned as a result of the information (e.g. course review, new courses, changes in publicity and marketing) for presentation to the equal opportunities committee and academic board.

Senior management should also use the results of ethnic monitoring surveys in reviews of the college environment to ensure that it reflects the multicultural nature of society. The use of displays, provision of cultural activities, signs in languages other than English, library, canteen, crèche provision, and reception facilities are all areas or activities which could be examined in the light of information about the ethnic composition of the student intake.

vi. Resources and staffing

Information about the ethnic composition of student enrolments should be considered when decisions about resource allocations are made within the college. The data may highlight the need for extra resources to be made available for publicity or marketing, for special support for bilingual students, or for student counselling on particular courses.

A comparison of the ethnic composition of students with that of staff in the college may suggest under-representation of particular groups in the staff body. This may make it difficult for the college to ensure that ethnic minority students are given positive role models in college life. Student ethnic monitoring data may point to the need to take positive action to recruit more staff from particular ethnic groups and/or the need to utilise fully the wider expertise of current staff.

vii. Student achievement

It will be valuable for colleges to relate ethnic monitoring data at the course level to information about student retention and achievement to establish whether there is an ethnic dimension to retention or achievement. In addition, information about post-course destinations should be analysed to find out whether particular ethnic groups are more or less likely to obtain employment or go on to higher level courses. Such information should contribute to course reviews and course planning. It may also highlight the need for additional student support or counselling. It should inform equal opportunities policies and may help staff to identify courses of action which will improve the quality of the service provided by the college.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE USE OF ETHNIC MONITORING DATA

This list covers the main areas arising from the research. They can be grouped under three broad headings:

- collecting the information;
- presenting the information;
- using the information.

i. Collecting the information

1. A senior member of the management team should be given overall responsibility for ethnic monitoring and retain close contact with all aspects of it.

2. All college staff should be fully briefed and appropriately trained on the purposes and objectives of ethnic monitoring.

3. At enrolment, all students should be provided with full information about the importance of the survey and safeguards for confidentiality.

4. Colleges should also collect information about students who are bilingual, and about the student's home language.

ii. Presenting the information

5. The results of the analyses of ethnic monitoring data should be published promptly and distributed widely at a variety of levels within the college (college, departmental/ section, site, individual course).

6. Colleges should construct detailed course profiles showing student composition disaggregated by age, gender, and residence as well as ethnic group, on an annual basis.

7. Ethnic monitoring information should be presented in as simple and accessible a form as possible.

iii. Using the information

8. Ethnic monitoring data should be used to assist in the identification of possible unmet community needs.

9. Colleges should conduct a detailed examination of any marked differences in students' response rates to the ethnic monitoring question and investigate remedial action.

10. Ethnic monitoring data should be fully integrated into all the college's planning and policy-making processes.

11. Colleges should devise and institute appropriate checking mechanisms to ensure that ethnic monitoring data are being used appropriately within the college.

12. Senior management should use the results of ethnic monitoring surveys in reviews of the college environment to ensure that it reflects the multicultural nature of society.

13. Information about the ethnic composition of student enrolments should be considered when decisions about the allocation of resources are made.

14. The ethnic composition of students and of staff should be compared to see whether certain ethnic groups are under-represented amongst the staff, and positive action is needed.

15. Ethnic monitoring data should be used to establish whether there is an ethnic dimension to student outcomes. Such information should be used to inform course review and planning processes.

CONCLUSIONS:

The various initiatives undertaken by FEU to investigate and support ethnic monitoring by colleges have indicated the importance of ensuring that the resulting information is actively used by colleges.

The introduction of ethnic monitoring of student intakes should not be seen as an end in itself, a necessary but mundane administrative activity. Rather it is the first step in a continuing process of evaluation and research.

It is essential that the evidence supplied by monitoring is used systematically in all aspects of colleges' forward planning, including course offer and curriculum development.

The examination of course-level profiles which show ethnic, gender, age and residence composition of student intakes over time in addition to figures for the institution as a whole and specific departments, is particularly commended.

Evidence from ethnic monitoring surveys should also contribute to the process of staff development and in-service education and training. In addition to student monitoring, colleges may need to consider issues such as the recruitment of staff, and the extent to which the composition of staff reflects the composition of the student population.

If the introduction of ethnic monitoring in colleges is to prove valuable in the implementation of equal opportunities policies, the collection and dissemination of such information must be given a high priority within the college. The involvement of staff, and commitment and support of senior management in particular are essential.

NOTES:

1. SAMMONS, P. & NEWBURY, K. *Ethnic Monitoring in Further and Higher Education: An account of the ILEA's initiative* (part 1) FEU, 1989

2. *The collection of ethnically based statistics in public sector further and higher education in England and Wales* a consultation document from the DES and Welsh Office, 1988

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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